

Previously in Star Trek: Sarek...

Captain Kalin Kale, commanding officer of the starship *Sarek*, has been recalled to space station Deep Space Nine, where he meets with Fleet Admiral Nechayev. Evidence has arisen that the *Sarek* may be responsible for the nuclear decimation of a planet in the Gamma Quadrant. As evidence mounts, Starfleet relieves Kale of command of the *USS Sarek* and orders him to Headquarters on Earth to face a court-martial.

And now the conclusion...

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*.

Star Trek: Sarek

CHOICES Part II

“The Trial of Kalin Kale” by PJK

Lt Commander Yu-Fen Mickey Cosna stood motionless in the center of the bridge of the *USS Sarek*, her mouth agape. All the bridge crew stared at the viewscreen.

“Could you repeat that message, Lieutenant,” Cosna asked of Lieutenant Penji Fil standing at the tactical console. The Catullan security chief replayed the recorded communiqué. The dark-skinned face of Admiral Henry appeared again on the main screen.

“To the Federation starship *USS Sarek*: As of stardate 48393, Captain Kalin Kale has been relieved of command of the *USS Sarek*, pending a court-martial investigating the captain’s probable violation of the Prime Directive that resulted in the destruction of the planet Thorta II. Immediately, Yu-Fen M. Cosna is ordered to assume command as Acting-Captain of the *USS Sarek* until such time Starfleet warrants another commanding officer be assigned to said starship. Continue your mission and good luck, Captain Cosna.”

The screen blinked to the Federation emblem and the words ‘END TRANSMISSION’. Still shocked and numb from the unexpected news, Cosna hesitated a moment before she finally ordered; “Computer, I assume command of this vessel by order of Starfleet as of this stardate. Authorization Cosna-Alpha-One-One-Six-Theta-Nine.”

“All command functions transferred to Captain Yu-Fen M. Cosna,” replied the computer voice.

“Mister Fil, recall all information on Thorta II,” Cosna ordered the security chief. “You, Lieutenant Harcue, and Commander T’Veer will meet with me in five minutes in the observation lounge. I’ll be in the ready room for a moment. Mister Kes, you have the bridge for now.”

“Yes, Comm... I mean Captain,” replied the felinoid helm officer, her fur bristling in momentary embarrassment.

Cosna walked into the ready room and stood, looking around. She had always admired Kale’s book collection – mostly science fiction novels written during Earth’s 20th and 21st centuries – that stood on the book shelves in the far corner of the room. That – along with the model of the *Sverdlov* and various trinkets on the desk – always made Cosna feel the ready room could belong to none other than Kale.

“Don’t worry, Captain. We’ll find out what happened. We won’t let you take the fall.”

* * * *

“I cannot and will not believe that Captain Kale would commit such a breach of conduct that an entire world would be destroyed!” exclaimed Commander Benjamin Sisko, Federation administrator to the Bajoran space station *Deep Space Nine*. “I’ve tried looking up information on the incident but aside from the planet’s charting date, all information on Thorta II is classified.”

“Has the planet been placed under quarantine?” asked *DS9*’s Bajoran first officer, Major Kira Nerys.

“No, it hasn’t. And I’m going to use that to our advantage.”

Sisko turned toward his science officer.

“Dax; you, Bashir, and O’Brien take the *Rio Grande* to Thorta II. Survey what remains of the world. And don’t forget to take anti-rad suits.”

“Yes, Benjamin,” said the Trill as she and Chief Miles O’Brien walked onto the lift.

“And be careful, Old Man!” Sisko shouted as they disappeared as the lift lowered into the deck.

* * * *

Personal log, stardate 48398.5:

It seems my career is suddenly over and I can't figure out why?

I keep reviewing the Thorta survey over and over in my mind and I can't find where we might have gone wrong. What could have caused an entire world to be killed in the fires of a nuclear war?

Captain Koester and Ensign Bloom have been ordered to return to their mission in the Gamma Quadrant, as has the Sarek. Meanwhile, the USS Gorkon, my transport back to Earth, seems like a ghost ship to me. I'm not sure if people are just avoiding me out of discomfort or if they have been ordered to avoid me.

I must speak with Lieutenant Arbelo. He was a member of the away team that beamed down to Thorta. Maybe he can remember something I can't?

Kale, out.

Kale walked out of the cabin assigned to him aboard the *Gorkon* and crossed the corridor to another stateroom. He pressed the chime and a moment later the doors parted for him to enter.

"Monster, can we talk?" Kale asked Setton To'Lock Arbelo, a member of his own crew that had accompanied Kale to *Deep Space Nine*. Arbelo offered his 'former' commanding officer a seat and retrieved two drinks from the food replicator.

"Admiral Nechayev probably isn't going to like it if she knew we were 'getting our stories straight,' but I still don't understand how they think you can be responsible for the population of Thorta II destroying itself!" Arbelo remarked.

"Lieutenant, you were a member of the away team to Thorta II, weren't you?"

"Yes. I remember having to sit for three hours while Doctors Rasa and Jacobson tried to get the exact hue of yellow on my skin by comparison to the transmissions from the planet we recorded. It's not something I would look forward to doing again."

"Can you remember anything you or anyone else on the team did – on your own or under orders – that might have affected the situation on the planet and pushed them in the direction of a war?"

"Nothing. I've been trying to recall everything that happened on that mission since we came aboard the *Gorkon*, and the only thing out of the ordinary was when I cut one of my fingers on a slab of broken glass. If it had been any of the others on the mission with me – Fil, T'Veer, Harcue – it might have caused a problem, identified us as aliens! But the amber tint of my own blood is only slightly darker than the Thortan norm is... I mean, was."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing that stands out in my mind."

Kale took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"I only hope the court-martial tribunal sees the facts correctly, that we couldn't have done anything to cause what happened on that planet. There has to be some other explanation!"

Arbelo nodded his head.

* * * *

"There has to be some other explanation!" Cosna exclaimed. T'Veer, Penji Fil, and Larry Harcue, one of the *Sarek's* helm officers, nodded their heads.

"In the meantime, this ship still has to function, and function smoothly," said Cosna. "Since I'm now the Captain, I need you, T'Veer, to be my first officer."

"The honor is to serve," T'Veer replied. "Perhaps our first duty should be to investigate what remains of Thorta II."

"Not feasible," answered Cosna. "We are too many sectors away. By the time we could do a thorough survey and report to Starfleet Command, Captain Kale could be sentenced to a borite mine in the Taugan sector. I suggest we compile a report based on the testimonies of the away team that went to Thorta while we set course back to Earth ourselves."

* * * *

The *Rio Grande* assumed orbit around Thorta II. Although six months had passed since the planet's nuclear holocaust, the atmosphere still looked a pallid brown from the dust and ash circulating in what was left of the air.

Lieutenant Dax and Doctor Julian Bashir donned radiation protective suits and checked their equipment as Chief O'Brien scanned the planet from orbit.

"Nothing. No life at all. Not even plant life or insects that the sensors can detect," reported O'Brien, disgust in his voice. "I've never seen destruction on this scale before."

He consulted the computer screen which showed a map of the planet's surface from the survey the starship *Sarek* had taken months earlier. He compared this to a map being generated by the *Rio Grande* as she orbited the now-dead world, attempting to match up the remains of major landmarks so he could find a good place to beam the doctor and science officer down.

"Lieutenant, I think I've located the sight of what was the largest country's military headquarters. Maybe you can find some answers there."

"Seems as good a place to start as any," remarked the Trill as she and Bashir stepped onto the transporter pad.

"Energizing," said O'Brien.

And with a hum, the two officers disappeared from the ship.

* * * *

“This court-martial is convened in the case against Captain Kalin Kale of Alpha Centauri, who is accused of serious violations of the Prime Directive of Noninterference, resulting in the destruction of the biosphere of the planet Thorta II in the Gamma Quadrant.”

The Judge Advocate General, Captain Phillipa Louvois, formerly of *Starbase 173* and recently transferred to Starfleet Command, read the charges against Kale. The hearing room was packed with onlookers, including Lieutenant Setton To'Lock Arbelo, Fleet Admiral Nechayev, Admiral Brand – the superintendent of Starfleet Academy, whom Kale had met during his retraining several years earlier, and even the Federation President Jaresh-Inyo.

On the tribunal to judge Kale were Captain DeSoto of the *USS Hood*, Captain Richardson of the *USS Tian An Men*, and much to Kale's surprise, Vice Admiral Johnson of the *USS Arcturus-A*.

“How do you plead, Captain Kale?” asked Captain Louvois.

Kale stood, and looking straight at the panel, yet not looking at anyone in particular, answered; “Not guilty.”

Kale returned to his seat as DeSoto said, “Bring in the first witness.”

The Klingon took the stand, placing his hand on the verifier pad.

“Kahtess. Rank: Captain in the Imperial Klingon Defense Force, currently assigned as commanding officer of the Imperial Klingon Ship *Klore*,” he stated.

“Captain Kahtess, would you describe the events as you witnessed them on stardate 48010.3,” asked Captain Louvois.

“My ship was on a return course to the wormhole from a mission in sector G-71, a course that brought us within sensor range of the Thorta system just over one Terran week from the date the Federation ship *Sarek* had departed the system. As we passed within three AU's of the planet in question, my science officer reported a large exchange of nuclear weapons between the land masses of the planet. We entered orbit to observe. The exchange lasted five hours from when we first detected it, apparently seven hours total. We used sensors to try and find survivors, but there were none that lived long enough to be found. After we exited the wormhole, we reported the incident to both the Klingon High Command and the Federation Starfleet.”

Kale's legal aide, Commander Bal of Teller, stood and faced the witness.

“Was there any evidence that the *USS Sarek*'s presence the previous week or any act by Captain Kale or his crew caused the war you witnessed on Thorta II?”

“The only thing I can say for certain is that the war occurred,” the Klingon captain replied. “What actually caused it is for Fek'lh'r to know.”

The next witness was a Starfleet commander in charge of compiling information sent to Starfleet Command by starships assigned to missions of exploration in deep space.

“According to the *Sarek*'s own report, transmitted by Captain Kale, the planet was, and I quote, ‘a tinderbox waiting for the slightest spark to explode into full scale, devastating war.’ Out of thirty-odd countries, only three were neutral and/or at-peace. The *Sarek* was able to determine the existence of ten different political alliances, the members of which were in either declared or undeclared states of war with one another for over seventy years. The situation was volatile even to the most casual observer.”

“And how do you believe the Prime Directive was broken?” Louvois asked.

“The *Sarek* may have been brought too close to the planet and been spotted by one of the planet's new orbiting satellites. The away team sent by Captain Kale may have transported to the wrong area or talked to someone about the wrong thing. Even the slightest wrong word spoken by someone on the away team may have been enough to cause suspicion – suspicion that lead to all out war.”

“Thank you,” said Captain Louvois who turned toward the defense table. “Your witness, Commander.”

The portly Tellerite walked over to the commander on the witness stand, stopping within a meter of the seated officer.

“Do you mean to tell me your entire argument is based on circumstantial evidence and a few ‘may-have's?’ Sounds like pretty slim evidence to me,” he grunted.

“In all the planetary surveys done in the last one hundred years, none – and I repeat, NONE – have resulted in the planet surveyed being so completely destroyed within so short a time after the system was surveyed,” the commander said indignantly.

“But according to your own testimony – and I quote... The *Sarek* MAY have been brought too close... The away team MAY have transported to the wrong area... The team MAY have spoken to the wrong Thortan... By your own testimony, the actions of the *Sarek* or her crew may NOT have had any impact on the planet at all! For all you know, a nut may have fallen off a tree and struck one of Thorta II's planetary leaders on the head, causing him to get mad and decide to launch a first strike against his enemies!”

“Highly unlikely...”

“But just as possible as anything you described MAY have been done by Captain Kale that could have affected the situation!”

“Well... maybe possible.”

“Not to mention your entire testimony is suppositional. Thank you, Commander. You're excused.”

Just then, a lieutenant entered the hearing room and whispered into Captain Louvois' ear.

“Excuse me, but we will have to call a recess.” She turned to Kale and said, “The *Sarek* just entered orbit and some members of the crew have expressed the wish to testify on Captain Kale's behalf.”

* * * *

“What are you doing here?” Kale asked his former first officer. “You were ordered to remain on mission in the Gamma Quadrant by Starfleet Command. Do you want them to court-martial you too for disobeying orders?”

In a small room in Starfleet Headquarters, Captain Kale glared angrily at Acting-Captain Yu-Fen Cosna, Lt Commander T’Veer, and Lieutenants Penji Fil and Larry Harcue, who along with Lieutenant (JG) Setton To’Lock Arbelo – who had accompanied Kale to Earth – were among the away team to Thorta. Commander Bal stood nearby while Lieutenant Arbelo leaned against a wall near the corner of the room.

“Actually, this could help your case greatly, Captain,” remarked Bal.

“I didn’t think we were doing too bad,” said Kale.

“They haven’t put you on the stand yet. Expect a strong line of questioning. Are these the members of the away team to Thorta II?”

“Yes.”

“We must talk in depth. Tell me everything that happened from the moment your ship entered the Thorta system to the hours after the ship warped away.”

* * * *

On Thorta II, Dax and Bashir slowly made their way in the radsuits through the remains of the largest military complex in the country that was once the largest superpower on the planet. After hours spent circling the rubble that was the facility, they finally found an entrance to the labyrinth of tunnels under the ruins.

They passed the remains of bodies sitting up in chairs or laying on the floors of the rooms and corridors, where after surviving the initial bomb blasts, the soldiers had died slow, painful deaths from starvation, radiation, and asphyxiation.

The tricorder showed, as expected, no life signs save those of some mutated single cell bacteria.

The corridor started shaking, knocking dust and loose items to the ground.

“The geologic stress from the war has produced a lot of powerful aftershock-like quakes,” said Dax, resuming the trek to the facilities subterranean command center.

“I noticed a lot of damage that trapped these people down here, Jadzia. Without phasers, we would never have gotten this far. I wasn’t aware that explosions could cause earthquakes,” commented Dr. Bashir.

“If the plate stress is too great, any large shock – such as multiple nuclear explosions – could potentially it off. These soldiers never had a chance.”

They finally came upon a large vault-like door, the military command center. As expected, the door was locked tight.

“Well,” Bashir sighed through his breathing device. “What now?”

“Simple enough,” said Dax as she pulled her phaser from its holster. She set it to the highest level and fired at the large door’s hinges, cutting through them like a hot knife through butter. Then she turned the phaser beam to the locking mechanism. A few seconds later, the titanium steel door was lying on the floor of the corridor. Dax and Bashir carefully climbed over the door and entered the command center. Bashir’s curiosity got the best of him and he started scanning the dozen or so bodies inside while Dax moved toward the computer. She scanned the interface with her tricorder. To her surprise, the tricorder was able to access the computer files on the still functioning equipment. Deciding there could be vital information on the cause of the war that destroyed the entire planet contained in the files, she started downloading the information while Bashir finished scanning the bodies.

“Out of fifteen people in this command center, ten died of dehydration, one of starvation, and four from radiation poisoning,” reported the doctor.

“Terrible ways to die. And to think, the Federation may share some responsibility for all this,” replied Dax.

The tricorder finished accessing the computer files. Dax reviewed some of the most-recent data, mostly logs of the days prior to the start of the shooting war. The final file caught her attention. She replayed it, confirming what she thought she had heard.

“We need to get out of here now!” Dax said to Bashir as another slight tremor shook the former command center, causing dust to drift down on the bodies of the dead.

“What’s wrong?” Bashir asked.

“We need to get these files back to Starfleet as quickly as possible!” Dax replied.

The pair trudged their way back out of the heavily damaged complex. Once they had reached the surface, Dax activated her communicator.

“Dax to *Rio Grande*. Two to beam up. Now!”

* * * *

“Captain Kale, would you please describe what happened on stardate 47996.5,” asked Commander Bal.

“The *Sarek* entered the Thorta star system around 1300 hours ship’s time. We charted the system of six planets and found the two outer planets to be gas giants, the inner four terrestrial. Only one of the inner planets was M-class and broadcast transmissions being intercepted indicated an intelligent race lived on that second planet.”

Bal stopped Kale and asked, “At any time during the survey did the *Sarek* make her presence known to the inhabitants of Thorta II?”

“The *Sarek* detected the broadcast transmissions from five A.U.’s outside the outer planet’s orbit. The sensors determined which planet they originated from and the *Sarek* was maneuvered into the system by a course that used any available stellar object – outer planets and moons – to mask our presence.”

“And when the time came to survey the planet itself?”

“I ordered that the ship approach from behind the largest of the planet’s three moons and maintain an orbit keeping us there. Enough broadcasts had been recorded to surgically alter the away team members to appear as native Thortans. I ordered Lt Commander Cosna to lead a team including herself and four others and covertly survey the planet for no more than six hours before reporting back to the ship.”

“And how did the away team get to Thorta II if the *Sarek* was hidden behind the moon?” asked Captain Louvois.

“The team took a Type 6 shuttle, piloted by my chief engineer, Commander T’Veer, who maintained an orbit over the magnetic pole of the northern continent to mask its presence, where the surgically-altered team members beamed down to the planet’s surface. The orbit of the shuttle was specifically calculated to avoid the five satellites the Thortans had in orbit, to anticipate your next question.”

Louvois smiled curtly. “Thank you.”

* * * *

The *Rio Grande* emerged from the wormhole at full impulse, but instead of docking at *DS9*, the small ship landed in the hanger bay of the waiting *USS Excalibur*, which immediately set off toward Earth at maximum warp.

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“Lieutenant Harcue, you were the conn officer during the shift when the *Sarek* charted the Thorta system, weren’t you?” asked Louvois.

“Yes, I was.”

“And you were also aboard the *USS Adelphi* and implicated in the incident at *Starbase 74* involving the *USS Renegade*, were you not?”

“Objection!” shouted Bal.

“I was cleared of all charges concerning that incident, Captain.”

“Yes, I know. Computer error, they determined. You were also on the away team to Thorta II?”

“Yes.”

“Did you or any members of your team feel you were causing suspicion while on Thorta II?”

“No.”

“How did the natives feel?”

“From what we witnessed, there was constant stress among the population we visited, due mostly to the undeclared state of war the country was experiencing with three of its neighbors. A cold war that had lasted for decades was starting to heat up. Most of the population spoke only of whether or not the government should launch a first strike.”

“So you would say that the Thortans had their finger poised on the button?”

“Captain Louvois, I would say they had their button half-way pressed long before our ship arrived.”

“Yes, Lieutenant. Our problem is they finished pressing it shortly after you left. Very shortly. After decades of what you described as ‘a cold war,’ that seems oddly coincidental.”

* * * *

“Lieutenant Fil, as chief of security, do you find any of the orders given or procedures followed by Captain Kale at Thorta II to be the least unusual or in violation of Starfleet regulations?” asked Commander Bal.

“No.”

“Are you sure, Lieutenant?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“Do you mean to tell me that Captain Kale has never broken any of the rules that may have lead to Thorta’s destruction?”

“Commander,” interrupted Captain DeSoto, “you’re badgering your own witness.”

“I am? I mean, I am! My apologies, Lieutenant.”

He turned to Captain Louvois.

“Your witness.”

* * * *

“Now as I understand it, you were injured during the away team to Thorta II, Lieutenant?”

Setton To’Lock Arbelo sat in the witness chair, his palm resting motionless on the verifier plate, and said, “I sliced one of my fingers on the broken door to a small business establishment. The injury wasn’t bad and the mission continued.”

“But how many Thortans saw the injury? Who cleaned up the blood? Weren’t there questions raised?” asked Captain Louvois.

“As a hybrid being of iron and copper based blood lines, my blood is naturally an amber tint. Normal Thortan blood was yellow, which explained their unusual skin tone, and the slightly darker color of my blood wasn’t enough to raise undue notice.”

“I see. How do you know a sample of your blood was not collected by the authorities and identified as alien to Thorta II?” Louvois asked.

“As has been previously testified, the technological level of the Thortans was roughly equal to Earth’s mid-20th century. The Thortans were incapable of identifying DNA samples. As far as our team could tell, no unusual notice was taken of my injury during that mission.”

As far as you could tell,” Louvois repeated. “One final question. You can refuse to answer this if you wish. On your way to Earth, did Captain Kale speak to you about any regrets or wrong decisions he may have made concerning the Thorta mission?”

“We spoke about the mission,” Arbelo admitted. “But Captain Kale expressed no regrets. In fact, he was very puzzled about the entire incident. He could not believe there may have been something he did that resulted in the loss of an entire world.”

Louvois looked at the members of the tribunal as she remarked, “So it sounds as if even Captain Kale is unsure if he is responsible for the death of an entire world.”

* * * *

The *Excalibur* decelerated out of warp near Jupiter, frantically signaling Starfleet Command to hold a recess on Captain Kale’s court-martial.

* * * *

“Acting-Captain Cosna, do you believe in the rule that a commanding officer is responsible for the actions or inactions of his or her crew?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And do you feel all commanding officers should follow that rule?”

“Yes.”

“Then you believe that if I can prove your away team or the *Sarek*’s presence in the Thorta system in any way tipped the balance that stood for seventy of Thorta’s years, then Captain Kale is guilty of violating the noninterference directive?”

Cosna took a deep breath.

“I’ve served with Kalin Kale for about a year and a half. I admit in the beginning we didn’t get along, but he is among the finest officers I have ever served with.”

“Captain Cosna, please just answer the question.”

Again Cosna took a deep breath, releasing it with a sigh.

“Yes, IF it can be proved that the *Sarek* altered the situation somehow, than Captain Kale must be guilty.”

A murmur ran through the observing crowd, just as a young lieutenant rushed into the hearing room and went up to the panel of judges. After speaking with them he left the room. Vice Admiral Johnson spoke.

“It has just come to our attention that the starship *Excalibur* is entering orbit right now with new evidence for this court martial.”

Bal turned to Kale.

“Have you arraigned for every starship in the fleet to show up one by one to help you?”

“I’m as much in the dark as you,” replied Kale.

Without warning, three figures materialized just in front of the bench. Lieutenant Jadzia Dax spoke to the judges as Chief O’Brien handed an isolinear chip to the court reporter. Doctor Bashir joined Kale at the defense table.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “We are the bearers of good news. The information we have brought should help your case immensely.” Meanwhile, Dax was explaining to the three judges and Captain Louvois about their investigation on Thorta II.

“This file was found in one of the still functioning record computers inside the largest country’s primary military command post. With your permission, we would like to enter it into evidence.”

“This is highly unusual!” Louvois objected.

“Captain Louvois,” said Admiral Eric Johnson. “A Starfleet officer is here fighting for his career and his reputation. Would you prevent him from being able to adequately defend himself?”

“Of course not, but...,” Louvois started to say.

“You may present your evidence, Lieutenant,” Johnson said to Dax. The Trill woman nodded to the court reporter who started playing the recording on the hearing room’s viewscreen.

The screen showed a view of the computerized command center. Far from the organized chaos one would expect, the room was a total mess. Many Thortans could be seen in the background trying to remove debris from the room as the Thortan who appeared to be the military commander, his green eyes flushed with tears, dominated the center of the screen and spoke, his words translated to standard by the universal translator.

“This recording is to anyone who has survived long enough to find and play it. It was a mistake! An accident! One big, irreversible catastrophe!” Looks of shock appeared on the faces of those in the hearing room as they watched the Thortan commander’s recording. “The great quake that struck our region an hour ago set off our automated defense early-warning system. The computers interpreted the quake as a pre-emptive attack and launched every nuclear weapon in our arsenal. Most of the warheads have already struck their programmed targets. They in turn set off the arsenals of our enemies. We set off a chain reaction and there is no way to stop it! None! We had the technology to start a war all too easily, but no way to stop one!”

The general slammed his fist on the console in front of him. New tears streamed down his cheeks.

“We calculate less than fifteen minutes until the first enemy missiles strike in our own country. This chain reaction will continue until every country on the planet has launched every nuclear weapon at their disposal. By our estimates, it will be enough explosive power to kill every inhabitant on this planet ten times over. I’m sorry. I truly am. We never expected a geological event to set off our defense systems.”

A look of resignation appeared on the Thortan general’s face and he leaned back in his chair. “If you see this, than the best of luck to you,” he said. “May we meet again in peace in the afterlife. Farewell.”

The screen went blank. All eyes in the hearing room stared at the blank screen. Some wiped tears from their eyes.

“An accident!” mumbled Lieutenant Arbelo. “An entire world destroyed by accident.”

“No, Lieutenant,” said President Jaresh-Inyo from a few seats away. “Not by accident. They were destroyed by their own paranoia. If they didn’t mistrust their neighbors so, a tectonic shift could not have done what occurred in this case.”

Silence again gripped the room, until finally Captain Phillipa Louvois stood and cleared her throat.

“In light of this new evidence,” she said, “I recommend that the charges against Captain Kale be dropped.”

“By all means,” said Vice Admiral Johnson. “All charges against Captain Kalin Kale are summarily dropped and erased from his permanent record.” The admiral tapped a gavel against his stand and added, “This case is dismissed.”

Relief flooded Kale, a smile covered his face, and he slumped face first onto the table in front of him.

“See! I told you we would win!” said Bal.

Kale just looked at his legal aide, wanting to both hug and slug him at the same time. The crowd in the gallery started milling about, most coming over and shaking Kale’s hands, offering their congratulations and the comments that they had supported him the whole time. Admiral Brand pushed through the crowd to Kale.

“From the first day I met you, you struck me as representative of an ideal Starfleet officer. I knew you wouldn’t let me down.”

“Thank you, Admiral.”

Kale saw the trio from *Deep Space Nine* standing to the side of the hearing room. Excusing himself, he walked over to them.

“Thank you. Thank you so very much,” Kale said, dropping his cultural tradition and shaking each ones hand before giving a quick hug to Lieutenant Dax. “I don’t know what would have happened if you had not shown up when you did.”

“Just boldly exploring the unknown, Captain. ...And clearing up some questions,” she said.

“To tell the truth, I was beginning to think maybe I was guilty,” said Kale with a sigh.

Kale felt a tap at his shoulder. He turned to find Captain Yu-Fen Cosna standing there.

“Captain,” she said in greeting.

“Captain,” he returned the greeting.

He stalled a moment, then grabbed the young woman in a big hug.

“Thank you,” he whispered in her ear.

“I said I wouldn’t let you take the fall.”

As Kale released his former first officer, giving her a confused look, Fleet Admiral Nechayev walked over.

“Starfleet is assigning a new commanding officer to the *Sarek*, Acting-Captain Cosna,” the admiral said grim faced.

“I understand,” said Cosna. “I knew my position was temporary. Who is being given the assignment? And will I remain aboard?”

“Yes, you’ll return to the XO position. A more experienced officer will take command. Good record. You may have heard of him. Captain Kalin Kale.”

“Excuse me?” said Kale.

“If you want her, we’re giving you back the *Sarek*,” said Nechayev. “Under the circumstances, we had to do what we did. The evidence we had at the time made it seem that *Sarek* had somehow caused the war to start on Thorta II. I apologize, Captain, and really hope you’ll return to duty as before.”

“Gee, I don’t know. I’ll have to think about it, Admiral. ...Alright, I’ll do it.”

A smile spread on Nechayev’s face.

“Very good. And you wouldn’t mind returning to the position of first officer, I hope?” she said to Cosna.

“Gee, I don’t know. I was getting to like the center seat.”

“Mic!”

“Alright! Alright! I’ll go back to XO, but you owe me, Kalin.”

“Fine. Next time you get court-martialed and I’ll testify on YOUR behalf.”

The End